

Argentina: Domestic Political Situation

President Alfonsin and the opposition portrayed Sunday's congressional election as a plebiscite on Alfonsin. The 45% of the vote garnered by Alfonsin's Radical Party has bolstered his already high political standing.

- The Radicals have retained control of the lower house of congress and may improve their position in the Senate next year.
- The show of public support may enable the President to take some of the tough economic steps--primarily budget cutting--that are crucial to the long-term success of his economic austerity program.
- The Peronists will probably be consumed with infighting that will preclude effective opposition to Alfonsin's political agenda.

Alfonsin's major political challenge in coming months will be to prevent further deterioration of civilian-military relations, which were aggravated by the arrests under state of siege provisions last month of Army officers on charges of terrorism and coup plotting and by the approaching verdicts in the trials of the former junta members.

- The services view Alfonsin as an adversary who has slashed armed forces' spending and publicly humiliated a military already discredited by human rights abuses and the Falklands debacle.
- Most officers know they lack the popular support and civilian allies historically necessary for successful coups in Argentina.
- The military also is split internally; disputes between the services and junior officer mistrust of superiors work against a coup.
- Nevertheless, bombings and abductions by extremists within the military will almost certainly continue, and there may be an abortive move against Alfonsin or an isolated garrison uprising.

There remains an outside chance that the military could overthrow the civilian government over the next six months.

- If the Army becomes convinced that its institutional integrity is at stake it might act without public backing. More arrests of military personnel or widespread prosecution of junior officers for human rights abuses could provoke such a development.
- The military could also intervene if Alfonsin repudiated his austerity program. The resulting economic chaos might discredit the President and give the military the popular support and civilian backing it needs for coup.

*Unclassified
by 4/1/88
in lower house*

*Peronist
dropped from
40% (2 years
ago) to 35%*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON ARGENTINA

Level and Nature of Bombings:

- About 3-4 bombings occur a week.
- Usually at night; little personal injury.
- Political headquarters and military buildings prime targets; latter presumably to cast suspicion on the left.
- Little evidence, but what there is points to military as perpetrators.

Abductions:

- About one a week.
- Not much known about victims; info not even in Argentine press.

Impact of Austerity on Military

- Military budget has been cut by half.
- Size of forces cut by a third.
- Purchasing power of salaries of especially mid and high officers down by some 75 percent.

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